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ABSTRACT

Seven case studies illustrate how rural people and communities have resisted the arbitrary limits of public policy. In contrast to one-size-fits-all education policy, a history teacher in rural southern Texas motivated his Mexican American high school students to collect oral histories in their community, develop them into a curriculum, and teach it to second graders. A California mother home-schooled her daughter rather than submit to the school's insistence that she be placed in special education. An Alabama community's successful fight to stop consolidation of its school renewed local interest in community and democracy. A college student successfully challenged a National Collegiate Athletic Association decision barring her from sports because of its rigid adherence to arbitrary and regressive educational standards. A Minnesota city council, recycling center, high school, college, and legislature cooperated on a student-run bicycle repair and rental shop. A Native Alaskan adolescent mother completed high school through correspondence courses due to a self-defeating community policy that limited local high school education. A Mississippi community that recommended integration of a student-run credit union into the math curriculum encountered resistance from the school board because it was not the board's idea. Recognizing policy barriers encourages people to work toward replacing them with policies that reflect a broad, inclusive vision of human possibilities. A chart lists state legislative hotlines and contact information for state departments of education, education committees, state-based partners of the Rural Challenge, and state-based rural and rural education organizations. (TD)

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Standing Up for Community and School:

Rural People Tell Their Stories

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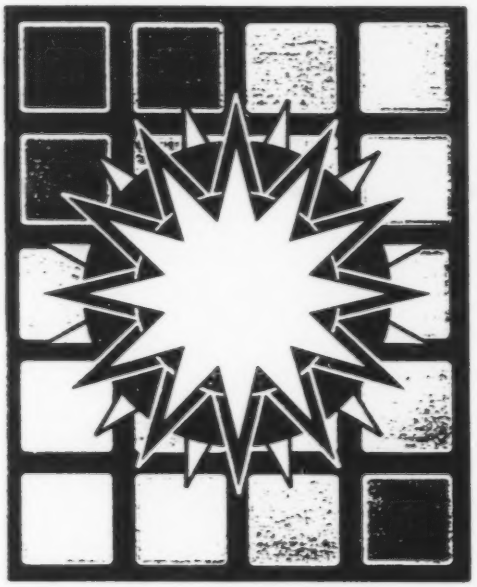

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By
Bradwell D. Scott
for
The Rural Challenge

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Acknowledgements

The Rural Challenge Policy Program is very grateful to all those who gave their time to be interviewed for this booklet. Beyond those whose stories are recorded in these pages, there were many others who invested their time. We hope to make use of their stories too, in future projects. It takes more thought, energy and time than one might suppose in answering questions and going back over past events, sometimes in rigorous detail.

Special thanks to Toni Haas and Paul Nachtigal, co-directors of The Rural Challenge, for their support and counsel–as well as their overall blessing of the project, making it a true family endeavor. Thanks to Marylyn Wentworth and John Eckman of The Rural Challenge for useful input, practical aid and encouragement at various stages of the project; to Elizabeth Beeson also of the Rural Challenge, who provided the tabled information for the conclusion; and to Kathy Westra, Director of Communications for The Rural Challenge, for valuable input in the project's last stages.

The Policy Program is also very grateful to our readers: to all those who are interested in the success of rural communities; to all whose supportive response and potential involvement is the reason this project was undertaken. Walter Annenberg's own generous response to the need to strengthen our communities, particularly in regard to education, has enabled this project–as well as many others, past, present, and future.

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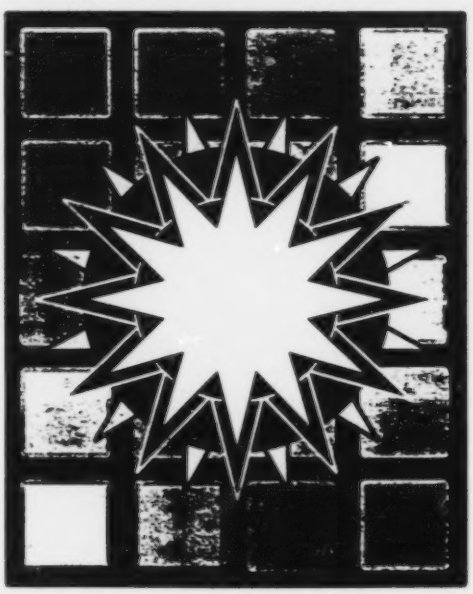

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Foreword

When Marty Strange, Director of The Rural Challenge Policy Program, came up with the idea for this booklet, he had something very clear in mind. "People in rural communities have stories to tell about the way public policies impact their lives...how they've discovered the importance of these policies and how they've dealt with them. It's not necessarily 'success' stories we want...it's actual human stories of encounter with policies that might never have mattered too much until their lives were touched by them...sometimes resulting in victories, however modest...and sometimes leading to ongoing, worthwhile struggles. Let's find a few of these people and let them tell us. Let 'em say for themselves how they discovered the importance of public policies in their personal lives."

That's all we're doing in this booklet. We're not entering into all the complex dimensions of public policies and the controversies surrounding them. Although the folks in these stories have something to say—good and bad—about the policies that have affected their lives, in most cases they're just discovering how close-to-home these policies can hit. They're just discovering how important—and how needed—their own voices are in responding to and helping to shape these policies.

The fact is, these stories raise more questions than they answer. Those involved in producing this booklet know that. Questions are pretty much all they want to raise. They're not saying, "here's what you should do when you don't like the way a policy guides, controls, regulates, attempts to equalize, tries to stimulate achievement, or compensates for resource inequities." Theirs are life experiences, swallowed whole, as it were. And their experiences do call for further analysis and perspective. Most of us aren't "experts" in meteorites. But when one hits, we all feel it—and we all have a role to play in responding to it. Just so with public policies. Expert analysis is indispensable. But it shouldn't—and in these cases it didn't—have the effect of dulling peoples' instincts to care and take part. Overridingly, their aim has been, and is, to see change happen—to see it effected at the grassroots level. The help of experts to sort the issues out and point up important distinctions is badly needed as input and impetus to this grassroots energy.

The way we all respond to the impact of a public policy—whether it's exasperation and indifference, or responsible engagement—makes a big difference. Each of the stories that follows illustrates the latter; they show how possible and needed such response is. We want readers to send us their stories as a way of building the fire and keeping it bright for others. We offer these stories as an initial, collective chronicle of how interest in public policies is inevitably ignited whenever thinking people realize that living involves caring. And caring is a mere abstraction without the doing that goes with it. **BDS**

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Who Cares About Public Policy "Icebergs"?

Introduction

Public policies should always be predisposed toward human possibility—the notion that we should live well, with open hearts and minds, and in community with each other.

"Every community," according to one passage in Rural Challenge literature, "is a richly detailed place able to provide a laboratory for learning. Children are young citizens whose work in school should serve to improve their community, and education is the responsibility of the whole community, not only of professional educators."

Here is a collection of stories about real people in real communities, from Alaska to Alabama, from California to Mississippi, from Texas to Minnesota. They're stories that speak to people who feel that public policy concerning education is an uninviting subject. It may seem too controversial, or it may seem like a kind of sideshow or deflection from more immediate concerns. It may even seem dry, abstract. Even as we begin to read this collection, we may think public policy is a subject that others have a "thing" for—that it's not much related to making a home, raising kids, and holding down a job. It's not where we *live*. What are we talking about? Rules and regulations? OK, we've got to have them. So let the governor, the city council, the superintendent's office, or the school board deal with it all. That's what they are for!

We *could* turn a blind eye if all that public policies amounted to were "rules and regs." But the truth is, they signify a lot more than that. The little booklet in your hands is saying, "Hear us out: we're people just like you who found out that if we don't take an interest in it, public policy won't take much interest in us when we need it most. We found out just how close to home a bad public policy can hit. We've gotten to the other side of some sticky issues but aren't claiming any great final triumphs. We are beginning to see how democracy itself feels "born again"—right under our noses—when people get together to make policy work *for* them."

So these aren't "success stories" in the typical sense. The successes documented here, in most cases more than equaled by the struggles behind and alongside them, are bringing something important to light about public policies: behind the rules and regulations there are assumptions about our human nature, beliefs about our limits and possibilities, and values concerning what is good and not so good in what we do.

Take, for example, the case of the young girl in Minnesota who went to a non-traditional high school that measured kids' progress on the basis of the skills and knowledge they could actually demonstrate within their own project goals. The girl was still able to get the highest score possible on the ACT, and while still in high school took college courses and got As. But when she went out for the women's softball team at the university she applied for, the National Collegiate Athletic Association said no—she didn't qualify because she didn't take the courses *it* prescribed for high schoolers. NCAA *assumed* that anyone not fulfilling traditional course requirements didn't have a "good education." It believed that traditional courses were the *only* valid courses. It neither comprehended nor valued an innovative approach to high school education whose principles are among the most respected among educational experts throughout the country—and whose excellent results are apparent by any measure.

And the result of this policy blockade? Nine months of tedious, frustrating, and (it's probably safe to say) agonizing struggle for this girl and her mother before the NCAA would finally relent. Nine months of putting her life on hold. Nine months of wondering how it could be possible for an outstanding achiever to be held down by something so arbitrary, imposing. And, we find out, she's only one among thousands like her, engaged in similar uphill struggles against NCAA's authoritarian policies.

Now, as burdensome as a policy like this is to many, many young people and their families, public policies aren't the be-all and end-all. But they do relate to everyday life more than one may suspect. So this booklet is an invitation. It's saying, forthrightly, that all of us had better get involved. We need each other. It's not just that public policies "matter"; it's that they're like icebergs: the tips you can see, reckon with, work around if necessary. What's underneath them—the assumptions, beliefs and values you don't always see—can be treacherous. At the very least, they can undermine or limit human possibilities. Or they can be ingenious and liberating.

Read the Judy Schmidt story that tells some very good news of what can happen when a city council, a recycling center, and an innovative school staff put their heads together to act on the basis not of "territory," but of community.

Read the story of history teacher, Francisco Guajardo, for more good news how Mexican-American kids living in poverty are discovering the meaning of "social studies" right in their own neighborhoods, and thus feeling inspired to learn more about the world. Why? Because their teacher knows better than to blandly subscribe to curriculum policy that assumes students will be motivated to learn subject matters that have nothing to do with their lives. You first have to connect with students—plug them in to their immediate contexts! Then they'll want to know *everything*.

Read the story of Native Alaskan, Aqualina Lind. Because of a self-defeating community policy limiting high school edu-

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cation in her village, she had to complete the eleventh and twelfth grades through correspondence courses—with a baby in her arms. What kind of funding policy would really help Native Alaskans to fully recover and appreciate their own "spiritual worth" as found in the traditions of their Elders, while at the same time providing for better educational opportunities that lead out to the wider world?

Read the story of Brian Jennings who fought a long, hard, and enduring battle against school financing policy that would have meant the ruin of one of the best schools he had ever known, *and* the community it's part of. The conflict got ugly, but the triumph was beautiful.

Read Beth Hogan's story of an independent mother—a case where precisely the *wrong* standards and the *wrong* ways of measuring a young girl's performance threatened to undermine the child's confidence. Then comes the open-minded, common sense of a single teacher declaring simply that "Lisa learns differently, that's all." It helped to turn the mother and her daughter away from the application of a "special education" policy that would have labeled and limited Lisa without warrant.

And how about a sixteen-year-old African-American, Kenya Parks, in Marks, Mississippi, who is president of a student-run credit union. She's learning math "more proficiently than ever," and is joined by community members in recommending that her activity be used as an ancillary, practical lab for other students to learn math. But it is doubtful that the policy of school administrators, holding to a sovereign view of their roles as the experts, will respond to a community-generated idea.

Now, if we find ourselves not sharing in the assumptions, beliefs and values that underlie these public policies, it behooves us to ask...what *do* we believe?

That's what folks who are part of The Rural Challenge have been asking themselves. And although their "creed" is evolving, what they've been saying to themselves and to communities across America for the last few years has become axiomatic in The Rural Challenge community of educators, concerned citizens, and policy makers. It all revolves around the idea of *community*: that people living and working well together is the primary context in which schooling should take place. Their work is based on these fundamental ideas:

- Human beings cannot live well in isolation. We need community.
- Community can occur only in a place that people share, face to face.
- Strong community is the best habitat for excellence in education.
- Excellent schools build strong communities.
- Every person has an equal right to an education that fully develops his or her intellect, and a responsibility to exercise that right.
- Providing equal educational opportunity for every person is the responsibility of the entire community.
- Education, like people, should be well-rooted in a place, and
- People educated to live well in a place will be contributing members of any community in any place they choose to inhabit.

With these guiding principles in mind, The Rural Challenge tackles policy issues in four broad categories. We list them here along with a few of the pertinent questions people might naturally ask concerning them.

(1) **standards and assessments** (Essentially, what are the ingredients of a complete education, and how do we measure students' success? Are standardized tests the only way to have "standards"? Should we give credit for "seat time" in a classroom? Should we test kids' memorization skills, or their ability actually to apply skills and knowledge in meaningful ways?);

(2) **equity and efficiency** (How should schools be financed to achieve equity in educational opportunity, efficiency of operation—yet be community inclusive in the way schools are run? Through taxes alone? Through private foundations or businesses, or some combination?);

(3) **infrastructure** (Are school facilities, the operational management of the school, and uses of technology all adequate to the task of encouraging learning that lives, relates to real life and connects with community?); and

(4) **governance** ("Who has—and who should have—the authority to determine where rural children go to school, what they learn, and how their schools are run? How are teachers and administrators certified, and how should they be? Is the authority structure that's in place the best one to ensure a school-in-life approach to education? Do the rules and regs allow for enough self-directedness among parents, teachers, community members, et al., while maintaining overall structure and purpose?)

Regardless of our proposed answers to these questions, they all reflect one passionately held conviction: public policies are supposed to help, not hinder. In one sense, a policy is just a written-down set of directions for how decisions should be made. More importantly, they reflect attitudes: they are a way of thinking—about people and their possibilities.

Public policies should always be predisposed *toward* human possibility—the notion that we should live well, with open hearts and minds, and in community with each other. "Every community," according to one passage in Rural Challenge literature, "is a richly detailed place able to provide a laboratory for learning. Children are young citizens whose work in school should serve to improve their community, and education is the responsibility of the whole community, not only of professional educators."

This is one way the mission of The Rural Challenge has been stated. It is specifically directed to rural America where communities are in danger of being eroded by myriad social and economic circumstances. But in fact, it is a way of thinking that applies equally to urban settings as well. Communities exist in both contexts. All must answer the call of higher standards in public schools. Some may worry that if troubled schools become integral parts of their communities (rural or urban), the troubles and weaknesses of the community will further weaken the school. But actually, there's no natural way to look at schools and communities except as elements of a whole. We speak of these elements as if they were separate only to spotlight the different facets. That schools and communities try to function in divided spheres represents an artifice of sorts—the result of cutting up a whole apple and assigning each piece its own "territory." That one—school—could work effectively without the other—community—is clearly improbable and unworkable. It is not indifference to or dislike of public schools that urges the thought of school and community acting more as one. It is simply a matter of seeing that they function more effectively as the right arm and left arm of a whole body.

The bad news of certain public policy "icebergs" that would work against a school-in-community/community-in-school approach to education is at the same time the good news of opportunity, ultimate freedom to choose, and possible victory. But let's face it: no one is going to get "turned on" to public policy issues until they become conscious of what they're doing to them—or for them. These policies are part of the very atmosphere, more than first appears. Reading these stories, one realizes that significant public policies affecting education can be both disturbing and inspiring, but never boring. They engage as they impact. They urge concerned citizens to the front lines of thought and action.

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Public school governance as we know it is modeled after the segmented, hierarchical bureaucracies that dominated the American urban scene during the Industrial Revolution. "Management" and "labor" were divided; the latter had little or no say in the former's decisions. The result? Labor was marginalized. It had no real stake in the organization, its economic well being, its culture, or its longevity. As management exploited labor so was the labor force relegated to the role of "exploiting" management. The industry was subject to an inherent proneness to conflict within itself. In too many cases—then, as now—an atmosphere of callous self-concern brooded over the daily agenda.

Because the early engineers of public schools were thinking within this paradigm, a similar, hierarchical division ensued between administration (management) and faculty (labor). Faculty's job has been to deliver what the administration (by way of another level of authority, the board of education) hands down to it: a one-size-fits-all curriculum based on the knowledge and skills in core subject areas that all kids must "have."

Francisco Guajardo's relationship-based teaching turns the tables around. It is as if he is saying to himself, to fellow teachers, and to the whole school system, we have an opportunity to inspire, to motivate, to really get kids in touch with their own instincts for learning. We realize this only as we take our share of responsibility for the school experience as a whole. We know that "the system" doesn't really encourage or permit this sense of responsibility. But if we assume it, nevertheless, we will be more imaginative, more energetic, and more conscientious in the way we perform our particular tasks. We will naturally seek to build substantive relationships with our students. The desire will emerge like the morning sun, as soon as we stop seeing ourselves as components of an assembly line.

So what's needed to inspire students is the inspiration of teachers. That comes from seeing them differently, giving them a different, more involved role in the school as a whole; giving them, as labor was never given during the Industrial Revolution, a sense of ownership in the whole context.

What's needed, in other words, is a redefinition of the teacher's role, accompanied by a reconceiving of the requirements for teacher certification. These requirements should include the ability to participate substantially in school governance. That would make a big difference for the better in how schools are run.

Francisco Guajardo

The Llano Grande Center for Research and Development

Edcouch-Elsa, Texas

Oddly enough, the most fundamental of all conditions for teaching—relationships—is often ignored, or obscured by the bland presumption that they simply exist and don't require nurturing.

Not so for history teacher Francisco Guajardo and his 15-year-old student, Orlando Castillo, at Edcouch-Elsa High School in the southernmost part of rural Texas.

"I think everything I do as a teacher, everything I do as a person living on this earth, is predicated on building relationships. Without relationships that can be invested in, growth cannot be maximized."

The fact that growth among students and community members *has* been maximized as a result of the work of Francisco and his colleagues has been noted by NBC, CNN, Associated Press and NPR among other media. Most recently it has been featured on CBS's *The Osgood Files*. Discernible student growth is only one indication of how palpable the benefits are when teaching/learning is allowed the interpersonal dimension.

"Intuitively I've understood this, mostly because of my upbringing," Francisco goes on. "I was born in Mexico, I'm from an immigrant family, we were dirt poor, but I was never in trouble or in danger of falling through the cracks. I've had this tremendous safety net. And if I've had any success as a husband, as a father, as a classroom teacher, or as a person who works in the community, it is only because I've worked hard at building relationships. It is the *missing element* from public policy. You know, it seems like kind of an intangible...it's very affective...and in many ways it sounds flaky. But it is first and last the most *concrete* and *relevant* factor in any learning environment."

So it is mainly by building teacher/student and school/community relationships that Francisco is fulfilling the objectives of the Llano Grande Center for Research and Development, funded by The Rural Challenge. The project actually involves two high schools and two junior high schools in the La Villa School District. Edcouch-Elsa is the second poorest area in Texas. The average yearly income is $10,000 per household of students. Ninety-one percent of the parents of these students do not have a high school diploma.

The purpose of the Center for Research is to make "pedagogy of place" really mean something. The program envisions students, ninety-nine percent of whom are Mexican-American, going out into their community, gathering and writing oral histories of long-time community members, translating them, and adopting them as integral parts of the curriculum. Francisco sees it as an "approach to eventually writing their own textbooks," and eventually helping to create a whole new orientation to high school education in his area. Meanwhile, through the acquisition and development of these oral history materials the community is developing its own historical self-awareness—all built on this very interactive relationship with the school.

"It's a great way to learn," student Orlando Castillo says, "because when you first learn to know yourself by learning about your own community, you can then learn anything. You can learn Shakespeare, you can learn world history...anything...because you know how to learn. Teachers like Mr. Guajardo really relate to us...we all

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come from similar backgrounds...and like, they really care, they respect us as people, and they trust us to do things ourselves."

Says Francisco, "Orlando has been historian, ethnographer, anthropologist and teacher, through his world history class. A fellow teacher, Delia Perez, developed a project for the class called the Cross-Generational Connection. She took her sophomore students... Orlando was one of them...to interview the old-timers in the community. These kids went through an entire process... developing a questionnaire, studying their subjects before talking with them, developing a relationship before they had the interview, going through the actual interview, taking the interview back to the classroom, transcribing it...*then*...and this is all very arduous, you understand... developing a narrative based on the transcription where you keep about ninety-five percent of the interviewee's words, establish a flow, build transitions, and give it some coherence with the intent to publish. Then the kids go into a second grade class and teach *them*, the second graders, about peoples' lives in the community."

Above: Orlando Castillo

Having recently gone through this whole process, the kids put on a cultural arts festival attended by many in the community and the sophomores along with the second graders recreated the lives of their interviewees, and had the interviewees in the audience to respond.

"It was a very emotional event," Francisco said. "In the sense that it touched people deeply, and it was really the moment when meaningful education actually *happened*."

Forty kids who have had the benefit of this kind of active, community-involved learning have been admitted to Ivy League colleges, according to Francisco. And this he directly, though not exclusively, credits to the active emphasis on relationship building that is at the core of the Center for Research.

"It is truly ironic," Francisco says, "that something so obvious, so vital, and so basic as close, mutually respectful relationships could be so overlooked. But it's taken this focus on the community to make the central role of relationships even more obvious and necessary."

Teacher training and certification doesn't emphasize the importance of these relationships. Policy dictates that the students achieve certain minimum scores on standardized testing, and so the teachers "teach to the test." What this does is make the test primary and the relationship secondary.

"But if our experience tells us anything, it's that just the reverse should be true. Policy never focuses on interpersonal skill...seldom focuses on the 'spiritual'...I mean, our own makeup.

"This is part of what 'pedagogy of place' means to us—history, politics, spirituality, economy, identity. But there are a whole army of teachers who feel compelled to keep going back to their files and not do the very, very hard work of place-based teaching. This is a tough choice, you understand, this is hard work, you almost have to shift gears completely and go in another direction. How do you tell a teacher who's been teaching for twenty-five years that they should be doing something different? This is where the resistance comes. What do you mean, break down the walls and go out into the community? That's chaos!

"Now public policy, both implicitly and explicitly, precludes teachers from sharing real, substantive power," Francisco says. "If they had this kind of power, they'd have a different perspective, other than just implementing someone else's agenda. They'd see for themselves how place-based learning, relationship building, is what works, is what promotes growth, is what makes education really come alive. What's happened is, teachers have gotten used to not thinking creatively because they're not *asked* to...because the way their role is defined exempts and prohibits them from this larger responsibility. They're pretty much defined around getting kids to pass the standardized tests...so when something new comes along, even though it's common sense and more right for the kids, some teachers shrink back and think the new demand is too much...it's not within their defined scope.

"They've been conditioned by traditional public policy."

There are two stories here. One is about a young girl whose mom had the courage and foresight to see that a well-intentioned policy of testing and categorizing "special learners" would work ill in her daughter's case. Another is about a teacher with the common sense to see that the policy was being misapplied in this case, giving the only support the mom had from the school.

Yet it's only one story. It's really about the fallible assumptions that are nested in more than one school's "special education" policy:

- *that an assumed "norm" of student learning can serve as a reference point for defining "special" learning needs. Who says that the individual child defined in this way isn't just different?*
- *that it is necessarily doing good for the child categorized in this way to be consigned to dumbed-down teaching and curriculum standards—or, alternatively, to be privileged with highly innovative learning opportunities that all students, in fact, would benefit from;*
- *that highly innovative teachers like Binet Payne, working in a special programs context, would be high on the hit list of teachers to be let go in the event of a budget cutback. It should not be surprising that the assumption concerning normative learning is both philosophically questionable and economically biased!*

Special education is a big word. It embraces whole spectrums of student learners—from those perceived to be "remedial" to those who are classified as "advanced". Much good has been accomplished by special ed teachers in public schools, by comprehending administrators and boards, and community taxpayers who provide for these teachers. But public policy linked to special ed is often error-prone—as demonstrated by second grader, Lisa Hogan (Pfaff being her later married name). She probably would have been more harmed than helped by accepting the scenario her school psychologist laid out for her in the course of

Above photo: Beth Hogan

Beth Hogan

Parent/Coordinator,

North Coast Rural Challenge

Mendocino County, California

Lisa Pfaff is grown up now. She's twenty-three, and after five years of college she's just about to receive her hygienist's license. But for her mother, Beth, Lisa's story is the story of a lot of kids at Laytonville Elementary and Middle Schools in Mendocino County, California. It's the story of their fight for the right to learn as *they* learn—as individuals who get it their own way.

Beth tells the story in retrospect.

"When Lisa was in second grade," Beth remembers, "I was part of an educational cooperative of fifteen local families who had been home schooling. But I tried the local [Laytonville Elementary] school to see if it could work out. I knew there were a lot of us who had kids who might not be able to sit in a regular classroom in rows of seats facing a blackboard, with a bunch of other kids all learning the same stuff, in the same way, at the same rate of speed. The school psychologist tested her and concluded Lisa would never work on level...she had problems with memory...we were told she 'fantasized' too much. I had a bad feeling about this. I thought about Lisa's well-respected teacher, known in town for her ability to move the kids through. I thought about Lisa and the other kids sitting at their desks with a teacher who had a timer hanging around her neck...literally!...a timer!

"Anyway, they told me she had short term memory disability, that the special ed class would help. So we went along with it.

"While Lisa was in this special ed class she and I met Binet Payne, who was at that time an aide. Binet was the first one to say 'there was nothing wrong with Lisa, she's very bright, she just learns differently.' I feel Lisa survived for another year at that school because of Binet's common-sense recognition of differences in learning style...and because of Binet's approach. In math, for example, she'd really focus on the kids understanding what a number is...it was hands on...she took them out into real life to discover numerical patterns in nature, connecting what's contained in books to what's 'out there' in stores and in places kids are interested in...she used tactile manipulatives that allowed children that immediate sense of what numbers meant.

"In the third grade the school psychologist reevaluated Lisa. Unlike Binet's prediction, the psychologist said Lisa would never work on level, that maybe she'd make it through subsequent years in school but always be behind in her class. Intuitively, I knew this wasn't right. But when I expressed myself I was made to feel like they're the experts and if I didn't do as I was told...keep Lisa in special ed...I wouldn't be doing right by my own daughter. In other words, I was 'bad' if I didn't agree with them.

"Well, I didn't agree, and brought Lisa back to home schooling...which the school did not support. It was their policy that if a child tested out as Lisa did, then she belonged in special ed. There were no legitimate alternatives. Nevertheless we homeschooled Lisa from the third through the eighth grade."

By the time Lisa got to high school—directly from six years of home schooling—she was, contrary to official predictions, very ready. No, academic 'excellence' wasn't her thing; she got Bs and Cs. But she was very integrated with school, played

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every sport available to her and was on the cheerleading team. In Beth's view, the arrogant imposition of psychological labeling, coupled with the punitive attitude of a public policy that would not recognize any answer other than its own, added up to a barrier—one she could not and did not accept. In fact, she says, "the system would have done more harm than good." As it turned out, Lisa had a "great career" in high school, was not "behind in her class," and did very well at Monterey Peninsula College in northern California.

Eventually Binet Payne—who helped to inspire Beth's decision to home school—would lose her job due to district cutbacks. Her role was thought to be of lesser priority than the traditional classroom teacher, even though she became fully certified herself. She did special project-learning courses such as having kids learn about the different subject areas through service occupations in the community. Teacher union policy said it was all well and fine as long as there was money for it, but when push came to shove, "special programs" had to go. And if the teacher doesn't have tenure, her program goes with her. Although Binet was eventually re-hired, to Beth the loss of Binet illustrated a system in "dire need of reform."

"For one thing," says Beth, "it showed me that respect for individual learning styles isn't basic enough in the system...it's kinda like, nice if you've got the time and money for it. Basically, kids are regarded as cattle to be herded through."

"For another thing," she goes on, "parents don't have any real say. The system says, 'you don't know—we know'...but the truth is, they don't know and can't know each individual child the way the parent does...they have categories like special ed or learning disability often substituting for real understanding...and all because the system is set up to exclude parent involvement, exclude the sources of understanding they need to do a good job. They're obliged to give standardized testing, but my daughter isn't good at testing. She learns in other ways...and she learns *better* in her own ways."

In Binet's occupational service program, for example, she makes the curriculum fit the middle school child's service. If they work in an office as assistants, they learn English in the context of writing letters and handling other documents. Children might learn math and writing skills by building a butterfly aviary, keeping a journal, learning science by observing the development of the chrysalis, and finding that the more total involvement they have the more the traditional subject areas come into play naturally and meaningfully.

"If you feel the learning experience *within*," says Beth, now Coordinator for North Coast Rural Challenge, "it makes you a learner, it gives you self-confidence...and that's an end in itself...there's no grade for self-confidence...it's measured in how alive you are, how certain you feel and appear to others as you take on project after project."

And even if the more traditional system does its job for some learners, the aliveness Beth is referring to awaits these learners too—through non-traditional avenues like Binet's, which are at present "nice if you can get them."

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implementing the special ed policy of the school.

Parents like Lisa's mother, Beth, rightfully complain about the "authority" of special ed tests and evaluators. The "experts" sometimes admit the inherently fallible nature of their work. And if the process of testing and labeling will inevitably attempt to override input from the parent, that process is less than reliable.

What's objectionable is the policy that presents parents with the dilemma of special ed versus home schooling—i.e., going without formal school is better than failing in the mainstream. The dilemma means that we're simply not taking full account of, and providing for, differences in learning style. Rather, we are assuming that one learning style—that which is thought to work for most kids—is "correct," and others are for the deviant. The public school system usually defines its curriculum on a one-size-fits-all basis. Therefore, special ed segregation (whether for remedial or gifted) has a marginalizing effect on many students. There is good news: special ed students often benefit from innovative teaching methods—the very methods that would enhance the "normal" child's school experience. Too often, though, such innovative teaching doesn't extend to the mainstream student.

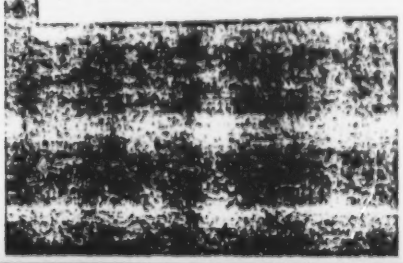
That students are segregated in this way is in part the result of school size: the more kids, the greater the need to sort them out. But there are dangers here, as Beth Hogan's story illustrates. In the ever-rarer one-room schoolhouse in rural America, for all its inadequacies, every child is known and teaching is centered on the developmental needs of the child in a multi-age classroom—what is now widely considered a progressive approach to education. Surely there are ways within a larger economy of scale to support multi-learning styles as well. Only the policy that fully acknowledges these legitimate differences will ensure that they are respected and engaged.

Control: use it or lose it. That's Brian Jennings' message.

Behind the message is the understanding that communities can regain whatever control they have lost, or stand to lose. Communities are inherently self-possessing, self-directing, and self-controlling—whether or not they are presently demonstrating these defining traits. These traits are no more theoretical, abstract, or impractical than the democratic ideals that underlie the founding of this country. If we insist on them, invoke them, make sacrifices of time and self-interest to put their inherent energies to work, they will be made concrete.

Spring Garden's self-sustaining non-profit organization represents concrete democracy in action. School consolidation in this instance would have been bad news indeed for the Spring Garden community. Its threat was felt to be equally concrete, incipient. But money interests alone, adversarial tensions, and subterfuge could not ultimately stand up to a simple vision of rightness that fueled the people's mission in Spring Garden. The fight was tough, unpleasant, gritty. It meant not caving in to the easy way of abdicating power when a bigger outside power wanted it all.

Brian Jennings isn't preaching. He's just saying that cynicism in the name of "realism"—apathy and passivity—are all part of a social disease. If consented to, the Spring Garden community and its little school would no longer be. He's saying that the disease may be pervasive, but it is not irreversibly contagious. It certainly won't be annihilated by money coming in from the outside (necessary though it may be); it can be annihilated through the assertion of practical democracy. In Spring Garden's case, money was the needed result; democracy was the animating idea from which the result sprang.



Brian Jennings

The PACERS Cooperative Program for Rural Studies

Tuscaloosa, Alabama

The story begins as an inkling of imminent consolidation. It heats up into a war between money interests alone and the best interests of kids. It involves dramatic collisions between personal and political adversaries. And it results in a great victory for community. That's the story Brian Jennings tells as a member of an association of 29 rural schools which, among other support activities, promotes arts in curriculum and a variety of newspaper projects. PACERS, the organization's name, is "dedicated to the welfare of rural schools, pure and simple," Brian says, reflecting from his small insurance office in Piedmont, Alabama.

Brian had graduated from southern Alabama's Spring Garden K-12 School in 1977. He started out in college majoring in early childhood education at Birmingham Southern University, later changed his major to business administration and eventually graduated from Gadsen State Community College. Then he became a successful insurance salesman. He says, "the Spring Garden community kept calling me home, so I eventually came back and opened my own business in nearby Piedmont. But ever since I got back, beginning in 1989, there was an undercurrent, a feeling of a hidden agenda to consolidate Spring Garden School. It had around 400 students at the time, enrollment was down, and community members like me kept getting little signals that maybe they were just going to close it."

One "signal" was especially ominous: if you asked someone on the Board of Education if consolidation was in the works, "you'd get a blank stare, a shrug, or they'd just pass it off somehow." One night at the Parent, Teacher and Student Organization meeting (PTSO), Brian and fellow parents noticed that only one board member attended, the one who represented their district. Usually all of them would be there. This one board member held a Cherokee County seat and his allegiance was always to the big school. Spring Garden community members asked him where everybody else was. His reply: "They're probably holed up somewhere making plans to close your school."

Enter Jack Shelton from the University of Alabama, who, along with Robin Lambert, had recently formed the PACERS cooperative and had definite knowledge of the board's intention to close Spring Garden School. The arguments, as Jack conveyed them, felt alarmingly indifferent to children's needs and perspectives. They also felt stereotyped: small schools are too expensive, can't offer the curriculum of larger schools. "Bus 'em to Cherokee High School and save a ton of money," was the idea.

Jack met Brian by way of the school's principal, who brought the two of them together to discuss the matter. Jack and Brian came up with a three part strategy: make the community aware, prepare to rebut the board's purely financial reasons for closing the school, and begin that night to explore ways to make the Spring Garden community more self sustaining.

"All we had to do is get on the phone and get one community member to call another. Eventually we had a meeting at the school. The whole community came. We realized we had been too comfortable, like fat cats, not paying attention to the road signs, plodding along blindly. We woke up and started looking into things. We found out the board had gone a lot far-

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ther than anyone thought in their consolidation plan...even to the point of putting money down for land on which to build a more centralized school so they could bus all the kids there from at least three rural communities."

Waking up to the problem was the first phase of enlightenment; getting acquainted with their own educational history was the next phase. Notes Brian, with the help of a history teacher at Jacksonville State (widely known as a teachers' school in Alabama), the concerned citizens of Spring Garden "dug up their first round of ammunition."

"They produced documentation that compared the success ratio of students who came from small schools, 500 or less, to larger schools. The conclusion was that success was much higher in these smaller schools, measured partly in GPA, partly in the length of time students stayed in school, and partly in the number of such students who completed four-year college degrees. These successes were even more proven in Spring Garden's case."

Jack Shelton also supplied community members with information demonstrating how previous consolidation efforts had failed when financial interests were elevated above the interests of students. "He helped us to see what was really at stake...the welfare of the child and the community, and the sense of place." So along with two other Spring Garden graduates, Brian formed a 501(c)(3) school foundation to raise money for Spring Garden School and to involve the community in various efforts needed to preserve it. They called it The Spring Garden Community Support Trust Fund, Inc. Through it, community members learned and talked together, gradually raised money at the rate of $100 per voting member, went to the board of education meetings and filled the building. Even the sidewalks were filled. "Each time they knew they were in for a battle," Brian reflects. And to these citizens, knowledge was both wealth and power. "We knew more than they knew about failed efforts at consolidation...that there was, for example, a much greater drop-out rate that resulted...that it was insane to think you could pick up a Kindergartner at 5:45 in the morning, bring him to a docking station, put him on a bigger bus, and get him to school two hours later ready to learn and participate."

It was a two-and-a-half-year battle—fund raising and educating Spring Garden and three other rural communities. Eventually the citizen's group defeated two intransigent board members who were replaced with two from rural areas in Cherokee County. After that, the whole momentum toward consolidation slowed down; Spring Garden community members had a more attentive audience with the board of education.

There was still a lot to do, however. Brian and the chairman of the board "went toe to toe on many occasions," Brian says. "We even got to the point where the Birmingham news media—print and TV—caught us in heated debate. He'd say, 'your enrollment's dropping, but your costs are not'...but then we called him on the fact that they'd been taking kids away from us by changing bus routes and making it impossible for many kids to go to Spring Garden. In effect, they were manipulating the numbers, and we got that stopped."

With matching grants from the Alabama Power Company, the Spring Garden Community Support Trust Fund eventually *raised* over $250,000 for their school—interest on which is invested in school facilities, teachers and various programs. The school has stayed open and flourished to this day. The chairman of the school board later died of cancer, but a few weeks before he did, he came to see Brian at his (Brian's) office. "He sat down and apologized to me...he said he never realized how important it was to live, work, and educate in one's own community. He opened his billfold and gave us money and became a member of our trust fund."

The chairman's changing view was reflected in the board as well. With increasing funds, the whole atmosphere of Spring Garden's relations with the board of education has been buoyed up. The State says, "the more self-sustaining you are, the better we feel about supporting you," according to Brian. "So now we can go to them and say, 'we want to replace the doors of our school and it'll cost ten thousand bucks. Now we'd rather spend some on the doors, and some on new computers...can you people help us out?'...and they'll step in and help."

As it turns out, a money-driven board of education itself became an integral part of the community it once opposed. Surely this is more than a story about getting the political upper hand. It's about transformation in relationships, breaking into new and productive paths of understanding.

Yet the moral of the story is hard-headed, as Brian sees it: communities must take financial possession of themselves; they won't survive on idealism, self-celebration, or even a grant or two from a well-meaning foundation. If they want to avoid their own demise, whether it's death-by-consolidation or something else, they have to achieve the financial wherewithal—and that is an outgrowth of a deep and persistent caring.

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Let's be clear about one thing: "standardization" is not synonymous with "standards." There are good trucks that aren't Dodge Rams. There are good short stories that aren't written by the inventor of the form, Edgar Allan Poe. There are good double cheeseburgers that aren't Big Macs. And there are good approaches to teaching and learning that aren't based on present-day, factory-model schools invented during the industrial era.

In fact the last example presents a bewildering irony. Although the "three Rs," teacher-centered classrooms, and conventional grading and credit systems still persist, one would be hard-pressed to find a single educational conference for teachers and administrators anywhere in the country that advocated for these outworn and demonstrably ineffectual practices. Yet our familiarity with them continues to be the basis of their perceived reliability and authority.

Factory-model schools, along with the curriculum and assessment standards that go with them, are on the wane. Educationally, this country is in transition; though traditional standards and assessments aren't all bad and are likely to be around for a long time, new schools with new ideas are cropping up everywhere. They don't want to "throw out" what has been considered essential content in K-12 learning. In many cases, like the one portrayed in this story, they want more than what has been termed "essential"; they want more meaningful ways of assessing progress and accomplishment. In regard to schools, many of our best researchers and advocates are saying we're at approximately the same place we were some years ago when computers were replacing typewriters. A school like the Minnesota New Country School is an example. It only departs from tradition in order to go beyond what tradition has

Above Photo: Dee Grover-Thomas (left) and daughter, Hope

Dee Grover-Thomas

Minnesota New Country School

Henderson, Minnesota

According to recent polls', most of us assume that local public policies affecting our kids' schooling may be flawed in some ways, but they're generally OK: worked out by reasonable people in elected offices, reflecting the common good. (Nationally, well, that may be a different thing.) We voice our opinion with our votes, glad and reassured we can do that in this country. Some policies get us *riled*—motivate and mobilize us. School safety is probably the biggest issue with us. There are many in the news who seem continually riled—and that's OK too: we can be the alert and responsible bystanders. We can pretty much "let the other guy" fight the battles that need fighting. In the last analysis, the whole arena of educational policy seems relatively benign. Most of us don't spend much time on it.

But what happened to Dee Grover-Thomas, teacher and parent, and daughter Hope, is an eye opener to us "responsible bystanders." For when Hope's well-earned expectations of a sterling academic and athletic future were about to go up in smoke because of unfair public policy, the urgent personal importance of such policy was driven home.

Here's what happened.

Hope applied to Temple University, offering an A average in 80 college credits while enrolled in a special pre-college program at Mankato State University. In this program she had completed all general education requirements for a bachelor's degree and was ready to concentrate on her major. She scored 30 on the ACT (American College Testing Program admissions test), placing her in the top ten percent.

Hope also wanted to play on the women's softball team when she went to college. But the National Collegiate Athletic Association said no.

Why? Because Minnesota New Country School (MNCS), where she graduated, does not give grades or credits. Its use of other conventional assessments—such as the Stanford Achievement Tests—are only to provide assurance that students aren't falling behind in any major academic area. But such assessments, along with traditional specifications of course requirements and content, are more than internal gauges to the NCAA: they're what this organization uses to determine student eligibility for college sports.

By contrast, MNCS focuses on ensuring that students can demonstrate skills and knowledge before they graduate. It's called "performance-based learning." Many educators, like prominent reformer Ted Sizer on whose principles the school is based, regard this method as a tried and true—and much better—approach to schooling. Rather than crediting "seat time" within a one-size-fits-all curriculum, MNCS says that for students to graduate they have to demonstrate actual skills and competencies within the context of individualized programs. Such programs include the core content of traditional subject areas (math, reading, science, history, etc.). Judging from Hope's scores on the ACT and the grades she earned doing college-level work, you'd think performance-based learning was doing its job—admirably.

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So that's what Dee and her daughter set out to make clear—to the NCAA itself, to Senator Paul Wellstone, and to a high-level representative of Governor Arnie Carlson's office. Enlisted in the fight for justice was Joe Nathan, Director of the Center for School Change at the University of Minnesota.

Dee recalls, "It started when we got this letter from the NCAA saying the various items in Hope's portfolio didn't fall within their standards and definitions...that she didn't take the specific courses she needed to be ready for college...she didn't have the academic background and so on. We knew better, and actually the evidence was quite the contrary ...but they were just like a machine, they didn't have a way of grasping anything outside their own scope.

"So we had to keep going back to them. We let Senator Wellstone know about the injustice and he wrote an inquiring letter saying Minnesota was a strong supporter of charter schools and wanted to know what sort of redress was possible.

"All this finally led to our meeting with an NCAA rep, Kevin Lennon. He explained the organization's philosophy...that it wanted to make sure college athletes were also students, and to this end they had to set stringent guidelines. But he listened, and said we were the first ones to put performance-based learning on their plate. I told him, kids in general perform better in this system...they have to be self-motivated, have to use good time management, and have to be self directed. If they don't have these things, they won't get through...we don't graduate them on seat time. In Hope's case, for example, she developed an interest in El Niño long before it was a constant in the news media. Her project based on this interest led to her advisors submitting her research findings to a meteorological-oceanographic conference in Edinburgh, Scotland.

"So I made it clear to him...when the content of curriculum is student led you have a buy-in that's phenomenal. If English is what they hate, it can be worked into a project that they absolutely love. That way everyone knows the student is really taking hold...especially the student herself."

But according to Nathan, while results should be the issue, they're not. Nathan's recent article, "The NCAA: Major Barrier to High School Reform" (*Phi Delta Kappan*, June, 1998), says that Hope's case (among many like it) is one of astounding victimization, and it affects thousands. NCAA has delayed or denied opportunities for honor students, valedictorians, even a national merit scholar. Why? Because it questioned as few as one of the courses the student took in high school. And athletic students aren't the only ones victimized. According to Dee, a former principal, NCAA's "dictatorial influence" directly affects other students, whole schools as well. School and community leaders who wish to make reforms in the interest of better, more effective learning (other than what is afforded by traditional standards and assessments) are hesitant to go forward, "knowing as they do that they [the educational leaders] might be making decisions that will block a child's prospects at the college level. And so things remain static, learning methods don't change—and this is not in the kids' best interests."

The National Association of State Boards of Education agrees that the NCAA is "far behind the curve" on school reform issues. NASBE has strongly criticized the NCAA. More than 20 of the nation's attorneys general also are questioning the NCAA because of parent and educator concerns expressed to them. What has given rise to such a fervor of protest? Here's the background.

The NCAA was strongly challenged 10 years ago when several professional athletes reported that although they attended universities, they could barely read. Congress questioned how this could happen. The NCAA decided to create a minimum standards for prospective college athletes. Students had to earn a certain grade point and college entrance test scores to be eligible—a worthy expectation. But then the NCAA decided to tell high schools which of their courses—English, social studies, math and science—are acceptable.

But that's only half of it. What recent investigation shows is that the organization's insistence on academic rigor amounts to a PR scheme. Ostensibly NCAA ensures that students aren't being exploited by colleges and universities. By setting up an academic screen of high school stu-

mandated, while including what has been best in it.

The National Collegiate Athletic Association holds students to tradition-based standards. But by doing so, it is discouraging movement along the current trajectory of educational progress, while profiting from the resulting stasis.

It's not "performance-based" learning or any other current ideas that this article is promoting. Nor is NCAA per se the whole picture. Any standard-setting institution can misuse standards. What's scary about the NCAA "juggernaut" is the fact that its standards influence those of the state and local communities; that in fact, NCAA's standards might just as well be those of state and community by virtue of its influence; that NCAA's standards are what we've got, and where we're headed, policy-wise, unless individuals (like Dee Grover-Thomas and Joe Nathan) actively work to oppose arbitrary and regressive standards, and to bring better alternatives to light.

It's not just sports that are potentially a issue. If it's sports today, why couldn't it be any number of professions our kids might be interested in pursuing? Put it this way: if your child wants to have the best possible pre-college education, think of Dee Grover-Thomas: you may be faced with "public policy" (or something that has a disproportionate influence on it) that will present an incredible obstacle, present or future. That just shouldn't be.

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dents, they tell the world that these kids are genuine college material; they're not just being used by the college to demonstrate skill and showmanship for the prestige of the institution. But the fact is, NCAA's standards don't apply to these athlete-students once they get in to college. So actually, from the college's point of view, it works out just fine for these students to "do their thing" as athletes, rewarding the college with publicity and major financial gains from public competitions, even though the athletes may be taking the least challenging academic courses at the college level. The net result is that athlete-students can still be exploited while NCAA protects the college (and itself, a financial beneficiary of televised and live competitions) from looking like an exploiter.

Hope and her mother challenged the NCAA juggernaut and won. She continued to submit requests to the NCAA explaining the basis of MNCS's educational program. NCAA finally gave Hope a waiver due to her college GPA and her test scores. The 19-year-old freshman is now a pitcher in division one women's softball. In addition, Dee says NCAA has said it would revise its qualification forms to take account of performance-based schools across the nation—even giving Dee a final look-see to make sure they were on track. Dee says, "The forms aren't the best, but they're a major improvement. And they have also promised a two-week turnaround for approval/denial, rather than the nine months Hope and I waited."

Nevertheless, an imposing, reform-blocking entity remains unreformed. Rural schools throughout the country are finding the NCAA is making those reform efforts more difficult. The policies it mandates, according to Nathan and a growing number of professional organizations involved in his crusade, continue to affect the educational scene adversely, by:

- making "seat time" seem preferable over results-oriented curriculum;
- often rejecting innovative methods such as self-paced learning, interdisciplinary learning, experiential learning, and independent study;
- superseding state and local authorities by maintaining the the right to reject any high school course;
- working against minority students. NCAA's self-study shows students of color have been rejected disproportionately; and
- perpetuating great frustration with students, teachers and administrators, causing personal trauma, and interfering with effective learning choices.

There are those who will disagree with Joe Nathan's and Dee Grover-Thomas' portrayal of the NCAA and its influence on secondary education. But

one thing is sure: their confrontation with NCAA standards and assessments policies sets in relief the pressing importance of these policies to every student.

"First Things First: What Americans Expect from the Public Schools." Jean Johnson and John Immerwahr. The Public Agenda. 1993. Also see subsequent yearly polls conducted by *Phi Delta Kappan*. 1993-Present.

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M. Judith Schmidt

Houston High School

Houston, Minnesota

As both City Council member and Director of Instruction at Houston High School (Minnesota), Judy Schmidt is strategically positioned to make school and community come together. But the story she tells illustrates the genius and power of an idea. And of course it also illustrates the importance of having public policies that can facilitate good ideas.

As an English instructor, Judy had already seen the benefits of getting students involved with community. She had overseen several creative projects which, in the words of Paul Nachtigal, co-director of The Rural Challenge, "blurred the lines" advantageously between education and the life of the community. Among them was the development of an "interactive biography" project that brought English students to the door of a World War II resistance fighter to get her story, to see and feel community life through her eyes. Judy says the genius of projects like this is the way the particular subject matter becomes "a linchpin of connection" to the whole community.

But more was in the works—something that would integrate school and community for the long term and continue to reveal the genius of school-in-life thinking.

bicycles

The Houston County Recycling Center had been throwing old, used bicycles into the landfill. Director Nick Nichols hoped to reduce this waste and contacted Houston High to see if there was a way to repair the bicycles, as well as rent or sell them as a fundraising effort. The call was transferred to Judy Schmidt, who was the junior class advisor at the time. Although it was thought to be a great idea, Judy knew it would be a difficult project and the junior class fund raisers were already planned. Judy thought a project of this kind might be something that would be of interest to the Center for School Change, headquartered at the University of Minnesota. She served on the Houston City Council and was aware that the city had planned to put land aside for a bicycle repair shop since Houston would be a bicycle trail head. She set up a meeting with the high school principal, Kim Ross, the mayor of Houston, Ron Evenson, industrial arts teacher, Steve Kerska, and Nick Nichols. After the meeting, the group contacted C.J. Robinson, a master bike repair technician, who lived in the district. Robinson was willing to act as a consultant for a bicycle repair class. As the school, city and county officials worked together with the Center for School Change the plan became a reality.

Bicycles that were thrown away would be pulled out of the waste stream and repaired by students in a bicycle repair class. Later, the entrepreneurial project would develop the idea of a bicycle repair and rental shop. This shop wold be run by students in a building/construction class, students in a business/entrepreneurial class, and students taking the bicycle repair class.

The Center for School Change provided the initial seed funding to purchase the equipment, reimburse consultant costs, and curriculum development costs. Other resources appeared—such as a grant from The Initial Fund, special funding from the

This story illustrates how a school-township collaboration on one project has given birth to a policy of facilitation in the town as a whole—including its school. The student-operated bike center for needy citizens has set a precedent for school and community working together. And this precedent is giving rise to other projects, other reciprocities, other mutually beneficial activities. We say it is new "policy" because the precedent has created a common vision; because through it the members of this community can see "win-win" partnerships developing on many fronts.

The policy of facilitation—which simply means town and school officials working together cooperatively as a team—can extend now into other activities. Perhaps these activities will be in the nature of community service; perhaps they'll have to do with the community serving the school in some involved way.

As this story makes clear, it's not just the service per se that is so commendable. It's the "genius" of giving students active ownership of their own learning experience as well as a genuine sense of identification with the community, through the service they are providing. It's the fact that this service is real and needed—it's not "pretend" work. Moreover, the policy of facilitation that is being acted on illustrates what the word "policy" can signify, aside from "rules and regs": an environment of creative attitudes, high hopes and expectations, the possibility of people trusting each other's dedication to the common good over territorial interests.

True, the good things being accomplished in and around Houston High School are uniquely facilitated by Judy Schmidt, who is both a city council member and an administrator at the school. But this says more, not less, about the possibilities of schools and communities fusing interests for the good of all. Schools and their communities throughout the U.S. can look to this example (and hopefully others like it) to see how a fusing of interests—the interpenetration of school and community—is accomplished. They can see for themselves why it's so much better than separate spheres of inviolable authority. They can see why wholeness is so much better than fragmentation in the way communities conduct their affairs. The "ideal" of people working together in a mutually integrated way can be as "real" as the need to repair a road or build a water duct.

Judy Schmidt and her colleagues are saying, "It's do-able."

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Minnesota Legislature, a grant from the Minnesota State Chamber of Commerce, funding from the American Legion and local Chamber of Commerce. As the project grew, the initial piece of land donated by the city appeared to be inadequate, so the city contributed land in the Trail Head Park.

The idea was approved, a piece of land within Trail Head Park was designated for the project, and temporary space for the new activity—"Class Cycle Bikes"—has been rented. Fundraising efforts are now underway to build the bicycle repair shop by September of '99.

Judy has been the prime nurturer and visionary engine for this idea. Already involved in projects for the Center for School Change, she was primed for seeing the full range of school-community reciprocities, perhaps more than anyone. It's an ongoing, hands-on learning experience—in terms of skills, and learning to function in the context of a business. It will help small-shop business within Trail Head Park, located as they are in the area where the bike trail begins.

"It's the kind of idea that both informs public policy while it is accommodated by it," Judy says. "There's the understanding that school is part of town, county and state...that kids can and will feel a direct connection to these societal entities...that they'll not be treated as children who only know how to play, but treated with respect, valued for their contributions. It's a vision that school should never be anything but integral to the community—not little plants put in a nursery, but there to help create solutions to community problems."

"The typical thinking," she goes on, "is to build a gym or a youth center when kids say they don't have anything to do. But when they say that, I think what they're really saying is they don't feel a part of anything, especially—hopefully their own families, yes, but not as a group. The only thing they're associated with is sports and school...and society tends to treat them as pieces of meat instead of valuable resources in community."

"The public policy implication is simple: schools should not be conceived, financed or governed in isolation."

But that's not the only implication. "There will not be kids in this town who don't have a bike and who want to ride the bike trail at Trail Head Park," Judy says. And beyond this simple charity is Judy's insistence that the needful kids not feel like it's charity. "We'll just find out who they are," she says, "and we'll make sure they have what they need without a lot of rules and regs."

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Aqualina Lind

Borough School District

Kodiak Island, Alaska

When Aqualina Lind, 20, registered at Kodiak Community College in 1999, Emil Charlaga, 16, fiancee and father of her 18-month-old old son, Orion, entered the eleventh grade at Kodiak High School, part of the Kodiak Island Borough School District. KHS is some distance from the village of Karluk where Charlaga's wife-to-be spent her high school days through the highest grade attainable: the tenth. While Aqualina takes computer science courses at night, her brother and sister-in-law watch the baby. Her father, Ronny, a full-blooded Aleutiiq (Aleut) Alaskan, is gone four to five months during the year, working to sustain the family as a fisherman, carpenter, mechanic, woodcarver—anything he can do with his skilled hands. Because he got his GED some time back, and had a year at the same college his daughter is going to, he also qualifies as a teacher's aide at the K-10 Karluk School, which typically enrolls eleven or fewer students.

Aqualina says it took a lot of self discipline to finish the eleventh and twelfth grades through correspondence courses provided by the Kodiak School District for villagers in remote areas. (She says Chris Provost, her correspondence teacher, helped immeasurably.) It was better than going to a state boarding school for Native Alaskans on Edgecumbe Island outside of Sitka in the southeastern part of Alaska. It was better than having to take a 45-minute flight to Kodiak High School. And it was better than relocating to the Chemawa School in Oregon for native Americans. Tough going, staying in Karluk, especially having a child midway through the program. But with a correspondence representative from Kodiak flying out to see her two to three times a year to see how she was doing and help with her work, she could stay rooted—with child, with village, and with family.

Says Lydia Abbott, Nuniat Ikuiirta (village helper) in the Kodiak Islands Borough School District, "the policies and laws that come to us from Juneau or DC show that they [policymakers] don't have a clue about this kind of subsistence living. They think it's a matter of just feeding these people...they don't realize that subsistence to them is a spiritual thing...it's all about connections with their land, their roots, and traditions."

Spiritual connectedness is undoubtedly the most profound reason why Aqualina decided to stay put in Karluk to finish high school in the way she did—alone, with correspondence materials piled on her desk. Despite the harsh challenges of survival, there was the promise of something deeply stabilizing, even health-giving, in her place of birth, pervaded as it is with her people's holistic traditions.

Lydia, herself a native Alaskan, bears this out. Another one of her jobs has been working with natives in a substance abuse treatment center. She says that when they have received native food while in treatment she's been amazed at the signs of renewal in their health and mental disposition. "Fish head, seal, smoked salmon, badarki...these things are highly medicinal to the native Alaskan...and this indicates something of why place to them has definitive importance. It also indicates why one of the biggest challenges is the sense of division that exists between native people and the service providers who fly in and out

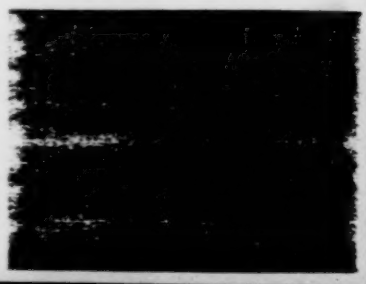
Native Alaskan Ludia Abbott says, *"We need additional funding that will bring well-qualified people into this area to teach not only academic but life-building skills, people who can instill a sense of self awareness and self worth."* That is exactly what the Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative (ARSI), funded by the Alaska Rural Challenge, is formally calling for.

In Alaska Standards For Culturally Responsive Schools, produced by ARSI, the writers outline "cultural standards" for teachers (along with students, curriculum and schools). It is a simple document—meant to give schools a readable list of criteria to measure how well they're doing in reaching their own people. They echo Lydia's sentiments exactly:

- A culturally responsive teacher incorporates local ways of knowing and teaching and creates multiple opportunities for students to learn from Elders in natural ways.
- A culturally responsive teacher uses the local environment and community resources on a regular basis to link what she are teaching to the everyday lives of students.
- A culturally responsive teacher participates in community events and activities in an appropriate and supportive way (including, e.g., "[exercising]...responsibilities ...in the context of local cultural traditions and expectations.)
- A culturally responsive teacher works closely with parents to achieve a high level of complementary educational expectations between home and school (e.g., visiting students' homes, involving parents, building on—not departing from—traditions of home and community.)
- A culturally responsive teacher recognizes the full educational potential of the students with whom they are working and provides the challenges necessary for them to achieve that potential.

And Aqualina, Kathy and Lydia would all agree with this:

Acquaint students with the world beyond their home community in ways that expand their horizons while strengthening their own sense of worth and appreciation of the contribution of their culture to the integrity of the world as a whole.



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and spend little time in the community. How would you like to feel dependent on doctors, dentists and social workers who, as good as they are, don't really understand, don't really relate? It's like being divided from yourself."

Paradoxically, it seems, it was the village's own decision not to extend high school through the twelfth grade and thus encourage its youth to break out of the perceived limits of village life. Says Aqualina's father, Ronny, "We felt that big city schools have more to offer than we in the villages ever could. We only have one or two teachers and they're assigned to wherever the most kids are...there's so much more technology in the bigger schools...we thought if we didn't get the young ones out of the village we would be depriving them of the education they need to compete in the world. One of our nearby villages has a hundred and twenty people, another has sixty three, and there is one that may have as many as four hundred. How could we expect our young ones to really understand how the world works and to be successful in it if they were stuck in the villages for their entire education?"

Kathy Rostad, an itinerant special services education provider for Kodiak Island Borough School District, confirms that the lack of an eleventh and twelfth grade in Karluk is not the result of a lack of available funds for those grades. It may be that the reasoning Ronny shares holds true for many—"but there is also the problem of lack of support of people who don't have children...it's a problem of apathy. the village has serious social dysfunctions due to alcohol, drugs and other problems."

Picking up on that observation, Lydia says that it's "really a spiritual education issue...to get teachers in the system who have the spirit of teaching that meets the native Alaskan student where he or she is and doesn't just impose authority from the outside. The majority of teachers are not native Alaskans and we need them...we need teachers who can respect and bring out the student's self-worth as a native Alaskan, while at the same time building bridges to the larger world. It shouldn't be a question of either you're a native and limited, or you're thrust out into the world without regard for your native roots."

Aqualina's triumph—her persistence in completing the eleventh and twelfth grades through correspondence with a newborn in her arms—may point to the possibilities of spiritual rootedness and expanded possibilities. While fellow native Alaskan Lydia Abbott and service provider Kathy Rostad had little other opportunity with Aqualina save to watch her grow, they often do help kids like her to remember their ancestral values and link them to their own future well being. Not so much by arguing for these values, but "through the quality of our relationships," as Kathy puts it.

"Aqualina seems to be an example of what can happen when there is the right

instinct on the student's part," Lydia adds, "coupled with the right input from those who care. And yes, this has policy implications. We need additional funding that will bring well-qualified people into this area to teach not only academic but life-building skills, people who can instill a sense of self awareness and self worth...people who can bring to light the issues that have kept native Alaskans locked in hopelessness, bring healing, healthy lifestyles and healthy attitudes, healthy ways of dealing with one another...not writing off the Elders, but bringing them into natural unity with their own offspring. We can't forever depend on outsiders coming in, making us passive. We need people who can help expand our possibilities from the inside...from the basis of knowing, and understanding, and helping us to recover our spiritual identity."

Above right: Lydia Abbott

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Kenya Parks

Quitman County Youth Credit Union Program

Marks, Mississippi

What do kids need to learn? In the old days—and for many today—the answer is so easy it seems tiresome. Reading, Writing and Arithmetic was (and still is) a common answer.

Whole new ideas about "standards" and "assessments" are being implemented. But many analysts say the jury is still out on these non-traditional ideas.

You wonder what they'll say about one 16-year-old senior in Marks, Mississippi for whom the jury is in on at least one progressive idea, and for whom the verdict is an emphatic thumbs up.

Not only is Kenya Parks an exemplary student by all the traditional standards at Madison South Palmer High School, maintaining a solid "B" average or better, she also is President of the Quitman County Youth Credit Union Program (QCYCUP), located right within the walls of the Quitman County Federal Credit Union, which established the youth enterprise in 1994 with a grant from the National Federation of Community Development of Credit Unions of New York. The idea was to "teach young adults how to save money, operate a credit union, make rules and regulations and perform a variety of job duties, ranging from a teller to a board chairman," according to Quitman High's literature. In the simplest terms, everyone thought it would be a great idea to give the kids something constructive to be involved with, keep them off the streets, acquaint them with how business is done at an early age, as well as "encourage volunteerism and philanthropy." It's a going concern, with $25,000.00 on deposit and 400 members.

But for Kenya it can amount to a lot more than these figures and worthy goals.

"It's really the way to learn math," Kenya says. "Kids in the '90's don't want textbooks. If teachers don't give them a hands-on way of learning math...well, then, some will learn it but many will not. It's partly because of the way math is...numbers just float around in your head if they don't apply to something that's real."

Kenya wants to see the activities of her credit union integrated with math curriculum. She can see how the credit union could be "like a laboratory...where kids would go to see how math relates to the real world...and to their own interests." She says her own math has "really taken off" as a result of her involvement with the credit union.

So why not have a student-run credit union as an integrated component of math education?

That's the question Robert L. Jackson, CEO of Quitman County Development Organization is asking as part of his effort to gain funding for a project to improve community living conditions in this northwest sector of Mississippi. He's saying just what Kenya is saying: make the credit union a part of curriculum and related standards—let it be part of what math is taught, an experiential way of teaching it. And let there be some appropriate method for assessing a kid's success in learning it.

"It's going to run into some problems," Jackson says. "Because it's not something hatched within the educational establishment."

"What's that got to do with it?" one innocently asks.

"That's the sixty-four-million-dollar question," Jackson replies. "It shouldn't have anything to do with it."

Although there are a few board members who are encouraging the idea of experience-based math education, via the credit union and other possible "laboratories," the development organization is "expecting resistance from the school superintendent and others in the schools for whom any new ideas have to be their ideas."

There are four high schools, four junior highs, and four elementary schools within the 40 to 50-mile radius of rural Marks. It would be unfortunate—and unnecessary—if community and school lock horns over standards and assessments in math education, rather than working together. For Kenya, "it would be crazy...we've got something that works!"

"If I have a 'specialty'—specific training in a trade or profession in say, textbook publishing, does this mean I must always have the first and last word about what goes into each textbook?"

The professional who asked this rhetorical question at a staff meeting is in fact a consulting textbook editor at a major, international publishing firm. She is also a 14-year veteran teacher in public schools who asks the same question about the teaching profession.

Yes being a teacher is, and should be, a highly "professionalized" and "specialized" job. No, this does not mean she shouldn't bring in members of the community, who have their own expertise, to help with the job!

In fact lots of teachers and administrators approve of the idea of "bringing in" community members to teach, though usually not for the core subject areas like math. But why not the core areas, if highly trained members of the community can offer expertise and opportunity that goes far beyond the usual requirements for teacher certification? A "practical lab" for learning math—whether it's a credit union, a bank, or even the stock exchange—has been proven to work in many places, not just Marks, Mississippi. And what works should be the only substantive question. Beyond that question, we may merely be asking, "whose territory?"—which is indeed "crazy" in Kenya Parks' words.

New policies that allow for community-based learning activities don't need to supplant school curricula. Such policies can be formed on the premise that the educators should integrate the learning resources of the community—not just tangentially, but in a way that is fundamentally inclusive. The ability to integrate in this way should be part of the certification process for both teachers and administrators. School-community integration should be axiomatic policy on the part of school boards.

That there should be even the prospect of school and community "locking horns" in a territorial struggle at the expense of student learning is an absurdity. Kenya's case surely throws light on a more sane and sensible approach to relevant policy.

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What Can I Do?

The stories you've just read make it clear that public policies concerning education really do matter—but not just in the way we normally assume. Yes, they're necessary as "rules and regulations." And yes, we've got state legislators, school boards, superintendents and other "experts" who are occupied with public policy concerns—sometimes for good, sometimes for ill.

What these stories bring to light is the extent to which our own lives may be hemmed in by bad public policies—without our even knowing it—by values, beliefs and assumptions about our very possibilities as human beings.

For example, a policy set by an athletic association is a most serious yet largely invisible hindrance to the education of untold millions of children both athletic and non-athletic. People with ordinary common sense are challenging it. "Standards" shouldn't be allowed to cookie-mold our children. They can reflect the highest expectations and still provide for the way each individual can demonstrate his/her potential.

Like grass poking through the cement, poor kids in southern Texas are responding to real learning opportunities. Why? Because a few teachers are lifting the heavy overlay of bureaucratically-imposed curriculum that would otherwise bury them in irrelevance. Who can say that learning social studies can't begin with real encounters in our own back yards? Because of their community involvement, these young people are starting to care about how their whole country works.

Instead of thinking of itself as a sovereign entity—a view fostered by traditional public policies—a school in Minnesota simply allows that limiting assumption to fall to the wayside in favor of a more natural and productive educational partnership with the community. Who says a community should be carved up into unproductive fiefdoms? Not these people. Why not work together?

The point is, good things can happen just by being aware of the arbitrary limits imposed by adverse public policies. It's simple: policies that don't reflect a broad, inclusive vision of human possibility are going to pose problems for us all. They will induce vague inclinations to just give up and "live with them." They will clutter the road to better communities and better schools with arbitrary barriers. Curious, too, the way complacency and mere self-interest conspire to make us imagine ourselves helpless—to sit by the side of this road and do nothing.

But just seeing these barriers is the first step toward living well in our communities—investing our schools with real-people interest and participation. Then, once the barriers are seen, it's possible to help with efforts to remove them.

Every little bit helps—even if there's only time for writing a brief letter, making one or more phone inquiries, attending local meetings that address policy concerns, volunteering to stuff a few envelopes, or casting a vote. Bad public policies affecting education are not insurmountable. Some take more work than others. But they are contaminants in the well. They have to go. And the "water" of open possibilities, educational vitality, and community vigor should be as pure and free-flowing as possible.

So make contact with those who represent you and find out what policies affecting your community and its schools are working—or getting in the way. The information that follows isn't supposed to be a nice, neat telephone book that sits in the drawer or under the coffee table. It's more like a Rolodex. It's on the desk and ready for *use*. And when you write or call, remember these important guidelines:

1. Keep it simple.
2. Use your own words.
3. If there's a conflict between "1" and "2"—follow rule #1.
4. Stick to the topic.
5. Be as specific as possible in the action you are requesting.
6. Be firm, but be polite. It's our right and responsibility to ask. It's not our right to be rude.

Useful Information:

Legislative hotlines: For each state, a legislative hotline is listed. This will connect you to the Offices of Legislative Services for each state. Legislative Services can provide you with bill-related information, answer questions, and connect you with the appropriate committees and legislators.

Departments of Education: The first column lists contact information for the education departments in every state.

Education Committees: The next column lists committee names and phone numbers for the legislative education committees for each state. Where available, the title of the committee staff person is also listed.

Rural Challenge Partners: The third column lists contact information for state-based Rural Challenge partners. Not every state has a Rural Challenge partner. These organizations are not necessarily involved in policy work but are available for referrals.

Rural Organizations: The final column lists contact information for state-based rural and rural education organizations. This information is adapted from the ERIC/CRESS *Rural Education Directory*. These organizations are not necessarily involved in policy or education work, but are included as an information resource.

Please note: In the interest of keeping this information current, no names of contact people are listed. Where possible, titles are included.

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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION	EDUCATION COMMITTEES	RURAL CHALLENGE PARTNERS	RURAL ORGANIZATIONS
Alabama Legislative hotlines: (334) 242-7627 (House) (334) 242-7826 (Senate)			
Alabama Department of Education Gordon Persons Office Building 50 North Ripley Street P.O. Box 302102 Montgomery, AL 36130-2101 (334) 242-9700 FAX: (334) 242-9708	Senate Education Committee (334) 242-7865 (Clerk) House Education Committee (205) 773-5554 (Clerk) Senate Finance & Taxation Education Cmte.: (334) 242-7860 (Clerk)	PACERS Small Schools Cooperative Program for Rural Services and Research University of Alabama Box 870372, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0372 (205) 348-6432 webcoordinator@pacers.org	
Alaska Legislative hotline: (907) 465-4648			
Alaska Department of Education Suite 200, 801 West 10th Street Juneau, AK 99801-1894 (907) 465-2800 FAX: (907) 465-4156 URL: http://www.educ.state.ak.us	Senate Health, Education, & Social Services Cmte.: (907) 465-3759 (Chair) House Health, Education & Social Services Cmte.: (907) 465-3759 (Chair)	Alaska Rural Challenge/Rural Systemic Initiative 1577 C Street, Suite 300 Anchorage, AK 99501 (907) 274-3611 (907) 276-7989 Fax ffrjb@aurora.alaska.edu (Project Directors)	Alaska State Data Center Research & Analysis Department of Labor P.O. Box 25504, Juneau, AK 998025504 Phone: 907/465-2439 Fax: 907/465-2101
Arizona Legislative hotlines: (602) 542-4221 (House) (602) 542-3559 (Senate)			
Arizona Department of Education 1535 West Jefferson Phoenix, AZ 85007 (602) 542-5460 FAX: (602) 542-5440 URL: http://ade.state.az.us	Senate Education Cmte. (602) 542-4178 (Assistant) House Education Cmte. (602) 542-5839 (Chair)	Learn in Beauty Annenberg Foundation PO Box 4380, Window Rock, AZ 86515 (520) 871-7790 (Project Director)	Arizona Small and Rural Schools Association P.O. Box 176, St. David, AZ 85630 Phone: 520/720-4783
Arkansas Legislative hotline: (501) 687-7771 (House) (501) 682-2902 (Senate)			
Arkansas Department of Education General Education Division Room 304 A, Four State Capitol Mall Little Rock, AR 72201-1071 (501) 682-4204 FAX: (501) 682-1079 URL: http://arkedu.k12.ar.us/	Senate Education Cmte. (501) 682-6107 (Chair) House Education Cmte. (501) 682-1937 (Chair)		Arkansas Rural Education Association P.O. Box 369, Turrell, AR 72384 Phone: 501/684-2253 Fax: 501/684-2253
California Legislative hotlines: (916) 445-3614 (House) (916) 445-4251 (Senate)			
California Department of Education Second Floor, 721 Capitol Mall Sacramento, CA 94244-2720 (916) 657-2577 FAX: (916) 657-2682 URL: http://www.cde.ca.gov/iasa/	Senate Education Cmte. (916) 445-2522 (Assistant) General Assembly Education Cmte. (916) 319-2006	Mariposa Co. Unified School District PO Box 8, Mariposa, CA 95338 (209) 742-0250, (209) 966-4549 (Fax) ostrt@yosmite.net North Coast Rural Challenge Network Mendocino Unified School District PO Box 1154, Mendocino, CA 95460 (707) 937-5868, (707) 937-0714 (Fax) www.ncrcn.org Yuba Watershed Alliance PO Box 185, Camptonville, CA 95922 (530) 288-3451 (530) 288-0508 (Fax)	California Small School Districts Association 1130 K St., Suite 210 Sacramento, CA 95814 Phone: 916/441-3300 Fax: 916/441-3893
Colorado Legislative hotline: (303) 866-3055 (sessions) (303) 866-3521 (between sessions)			
Colorado Department of Education 201 East Colfax Avenue Denver, CO 80203 (303) 866-6600 FAX: (303) 830-0793 URL: http://www.cde.state.co.us	Senate Education Cmte. (303) 866-4884 (Clerk) House Education Cmte. (303) 866-2942 (Clerk)	Colorado Rural Charter Schools Network 37888 Highway 24 Lake George, CO 80827 (719) 748-3911 (719) 748-8151 (Fax) Stewards of the High Plains Idalia School PO Box 40, Idalia, CO 80735 (970) 354-7298 (970) 354-7416 (Fax) Yampa Valley Legacy Education Initiative PO Box 774368 Steamboat Springs, CO 80477 (970) 879-4296 (970) 879-3943 (Fax)	
Connecticut Legislative hotline: (860) 566-5736			
Connecticut Department of Education Room 305, State Office Building 165 Capitol Avenue Hartford, CT 06106-1080 (860) 566-5061 FAX: (860) 566-1080 URL: http://www.aces.k12.ct.us/csde	Joint Education Cmte. (860) 240-0420 (Committee Administrator)		
Delaware Legislative hotline: (302) 739-4114 (800) 282-8545			
Delaware Department of Education John G. Townsend Building P.O. Box 1402 Federal and Loockerman Streets Dover, DE 19903-1402 (302) 739-4601 FAX: (302) 739-4654 URL: http://www.doe.state.de.us	Senate Education Committee (302) 739-4139 (Chair) House Education Committee (302) 739-2773 (Chair)		Delaware Rural Assistance Council Lake Forest School District Killen's Pond Rd., RD #1, Box 857A Felton, DE 19439259
Florida Legislative hotline: (904) 488-4371 (800) 342-1827			
Florida Department of Education Room PL 08, Capitol Building Tallahassee, FL 32399-0400 (850) 487-1785 FAX: (850) 413-0378 URL: http://www.firn.edu/doe/index.html	Senate Education Cmte. (850) 487-5213 (Staff Director) House Education/K-12 Cmte. (850) 488-7451 (Research Director)		Institute for Small and Rural Districts (ISRD) P.O. Box 1059, Jasper, FL 32052 Phone: 904/792-0892 Fax: 904/792-0894 Web Site http://www.nefec.org/isrdnet/mainbody.htm

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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION	EDUCATION COMMITTEES	RURAL CHALLENGE PARTNERS	RURAL ORGANIZATIONS
Georgia Legislative hotlines: (404) 656-5015 (House) (404) 656-5040 (Senate)			
Georgia State Department of Education 2054 Twin Towers East 205 Butler Street, Atlanta, GA 30334-5040 (404) 656-2800 FAX (404) 651-6867 E-Mail: help.desk@doe.k12.ga.us URL: http://www.doe.k12.ga.us	Senate Education Cmte (404) 656-5120 (Secretary) House Education Cmte (404) 656-5064	League of Professional Schools Program for School Improvement 124 Algerhold Hall University of Georgia Athens, GA 30602-7108 (706) 542-6551 (706) 542-2505 (Fax)	Georgia Department of Education Rural Representative 1666 Twin Towers East, Atlanta, GA 30334 Phone: 404/656-2438 Fax: 404/651-6867
Hawaii Legislative hotline: (808) 587-0700			
Hawaii Department of Education #307 1390 Miller Street, Honolulu, HI 96813 (808) 586-3310 FAX (808) 586-3234 URL: http://www.k12.hi.us	Senate Education Cmte (808) 586-6700 House Education Cmte (808) 586-6420		Hawaii Department of Education Rural Representative P.O. Box 2360, Honolulu, HI 96804 Phone: 808/586-3230 Fax: 808/586-3234
Idaho Legislative hotline: (208) 334-3175			
Idaho Department of Education Len B. Jordan Office Building 650 West State Street P.O. Box 83720, Boise, ID 83720-0027 (208) 332-6800 (800) 432-4601 FAX: (208) 334-2228 URL: http://www.sde.state.id.us	Senate Education Cmte (208) 332-1321 (Secretary) House Education Cmte (208) 334-3015 (Secretary)	Communities Creating Connections PO Box 356, Elk City, ID 83525 (208) 842-2218 (208) 842-2225 (Fax)	Idaho Office of Rural Education Boise State University 1910 University Dr. Boise, ID 83752 Phone: 208/385-1672 Fax: 208/385-4365
Illinois Legislative hotline: (217) 782-3944			
Illinois State Board of Education 100 North First Street Springfield, IL 62777 (217) 782-4321 (217) 782-1900 FAX: (217) 524-4928 URL: http://www.isbe.state.il.us	Senate Education Cmte (217) 782-8107 (Secretary) House Elementary & Secondary Education Cmte (217) 782-8107		Association of Illinois Rural & Small Schools College of Education Western Illinois University Macomb, IL 61455 Phone: 309/298-2961 Fax: 309/298-2222
Indiana Legislative hotline: (317) 232-9856			
Indiana Department of Education State House, Room 229 Indianapolis, IN 46204-2798 (317) 232-6665 FAX (317) 232-8004 URL: http://www.doe.state.in.us	Senate Education Cmte (317) 233-0930 House Education Cmte (317) 232-9838		Parents in Touch 901 N. Carollton Ave. Indianapolis, IN 46202 Phone: 317/226-4134 Fax: 317/226-4224
Iowa Legislative hotline: (515) 281-5129			
Iowa Department of Education Grimes State Office Building East 14th and Grand Streets Des Moines, IA 50319-0146 (515) 281-3436 FAX (515) 281-4122 URL: http://www.state.ia.us/educate	Senate Education Cmte (515) 281-7694 House Education Cmte (515) 281-3918		Rural Schools of Iowa, Inc. 1000 Walnut, Suite 324 Des Moines, IA 50309 Phone: 515/283-2625 Fax: 515/283-1928
Kansas Legislative hotline: (913) 296-3296 (800) 432-3924			
Kansas Department of Education 120 South East 10th Avenue Topeka, KS 66612-1182 (785) 296-3202 FAX (785) 296-7933 URL: http://www.ksbe.state.ks.us	Senate Education Cmte (785) 296-7386 House Education Cmte (913) 296-7679 (Research Assistant)		Kansas State Board of Education Rural Representative 120 E. 10th St., Topeka, KS 66612 Phone: 913/296-2303 Fax: 913/296-7933
Kentucky Legislative hotline: (502) 564-8100			
Kentucky Department of Education 1930 Capital Plaza Tower 500 Mero Street, Frankfort, KY 40601 (502)564-3421 (800)533-5372 FAX: (502)564-6470 URL: http://www.kde.state.ky.us	Senate Education Cmte (502) 564-8100 (Cmte. Staff Administrator) House Education Cmte (502) 564-8100	Appalachian Rural Education Network KY Science and Technology Council, Inc. PNC Bank Plaza 200 West Vine St., Suite 420 Lexington, KY 40507 (606) 255-3511 (606) 259-0986 (Fax)	
Louisiana Legislative hotline: (504) 342-2456 (800) 256-3793			
Louisiana Department of Education 626 North Fourth Street P.O. Box 94064 Baton Rouge, LA 70704-9064 (504) 342-4411 FAX (504) 342-7316 E-Mail: webmaster@mail.doe.state.la.us URL: http://www.doe.state.la.us	Senate Education Cmte (504) 342-0394 (Secretary) House Education Cmte (504) 342-6945		
Maine Legislative hotline: (207) 287-1692			
Maine Department of Education 23 State House Station Augusta, ME 04333-0023 (207) 287-5800 FAX (207) 287-5900 URL: http://www.state.me.us/educa- tion/homepage.htm	Joint Education & Cultural Affairs Cmte (207) 287-3125 (Joint Standing Clerk)	Partnership Rural Initiative in Maine 301C Bailey Hall, Gorham, ME 04038 (207) 780-5498 (2070 228-8209 (Fax) smp@usm.maine.edu	
Maryland Legislative hotline: (410) 841-3810 (800) 492-7122 (ext. 3810)			
Maryland Department of Education 200 West Baltimore Street Baltimore, MD 21201 (410) 767-0462 FAX (410) 333-6033 URL: http://www.msde.state.md.us		Senate Cmte. on Economic & Environmental Affairs (410) 841-3697 House Cmte. On Ways and Means (410) 841-3648	Maryland Rural Assistance Council c/o Caroline County Public Schools 112 Market St. Denton, MD 21629 Phone: 410/479-1460 Fax: 410/479-0108

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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION	EDUCATION COMMITTEES	RURAL CHALLENGE PARTNERS	RURAL ORGANIZATIONS

Massachusetts Legislative hotlines: (617) 722-2356 (House) (617) 722-1276 (Senate)

Massachusetts Department of Education
350 Main Street
Malden, MA 02148
(781) 388-3300 FAX (781) 388-3396
URL: http://www.doe.mass.edu

Joint Education, Arts & Humanities Cmte
(617) 722-1230 (Senate)
(617) 722-2070 (House)

Michigan Legislative hotline: (517) 373-0170

Michigan Department of Education
Hannah Building
Fourth Floor, 608 West Allegan Street
Lansing, MI 48933
(517) 373-3354 FAX (517) 335-4565
URL: http://www.mde.state.mi.us

Senate Education Cmte
(517) 373-3760 (Clerk)
House Education Cmte
(517) 373-0159 (Clerk)

Michigan Rural Education Association
Van Buren Intermediate School District
701 S. PawPaw St., Lawrence, MI 49064
Phone: 616/674-8091 Fax: 616/674-8726

Minnesota Legislative hotlines: (612) 296-6646 (House) (612) 296-0504 (Senate)

Minnesota Department of Children, Families, and Learning
712 Capitol Square Building
550 Cedar Street
Saint Paul, MN 55101
(612) 296-2358 FAX (612) 282-5892
URL: http://www.educ.state.mn.us

Senate Children, Families & Learning Cmte (612) 296-9248
House K-12 Education Finance Cmte
(612) 296-1072 (Administrator)
House Education Cmte
(612) 296-4255 (Administrator)

Center for School Change
C/O Humphrey Institute
University of Minnesota
234 Humphrey Center
301-19th Avenue South
Minneapolis, MN 55455
(612) 626-1834 (612) 625-0104 (Fax)

Minnesota Rural Education Association
1001 E. Mt. Fait, Fergus Falls, MN 56537
Phone: 218/739-3273 Fax: 218/739-2459
Web Site:
http://www.informns.k12.mn.us/~0999mr ea/index.html

Mississippi Legislative hotline: (601) 359-3719

Mississippi State Department of Education
Suite 36, 359 North West Street
Jackson, MS 39201
(601) 359-3513 FAX (601) 359-3242
URL: http://mdek12.state.ms.us

House Education Cmte
(601) 359-3331

Southern Initiative of the Algebra Project
Positive Innovations, Inc.
5135A Galaxie Drive
PO Box 13917, Jackson, MS 39236-3917
(601) 362-0144 (601) 362-5788 (Fax)

Missouri Legislative hotline: (573) 751-4633

Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
Sixth Floor, 205 Jefferson Street
Jefferson City, MO 65102
(573) 751-4446 FAX (573) 751-1179
E-Mail: commiss@mail.dese.state.mo.us
URL: http://services.dese.state.mo.us

Senate Education Cmte
(573) 751-8437 (Staff)
House Education (Elementary & Secondary) Cmte
(573) 751-1492 (Legislative Analyst)

Missouri Association of Rural Education
Box 157A
St. Elizabeth, MO 65075
Phone: 314/493-2373 Fax: 314/493-2545

Montana Legislative hotlines: (406) 444-4800 (sessions) (406) 444-3064 (between sessions)

Montana Office of Public Instruction
P.O. Box 202501
Helena, MT 59620-2501
(406) 444-2082 FAX (406) 444-3924
URL: http://www.metnet.mt.gov/

Senate Education & Cultural Resource Cmte (406) 392-5388
(Legislative Council Staff)
House Education Cmte
(406) 444-4829
(Legislative Council Staff)

Montana Rural Education Association
P.O. Box 5418
Helena, MT 59604
Phone: 406/442-8813
Fax: 406/442-8839

Nebraska Legislative hotlines: (402) 471-2709 (sessions) (402) 471-2271 (between sessions)

Nebraska Department of Education
301 Centennial Mall South
P.O. Box 94987, Lincoln, NE 68509-4987
(402) 471-7295 FAX (402) 471-0017
E-Mail:
Eduneb@NDE4.NDE.State.NE.US
URL: http://WWW.NDE.State.NE.US

Senate Education Cmte
(402) 471-2712 (Clerk)

School at the Center
119 Henzlik Hall
Center for Curriculum and Instruction
PO Box 880355
(402) 472-6395 (402) 472-8317 Fax
72652.427@compuserve.com

Nebraska Rural Community Schools Association
Box 157, Hildreth, NE 68947
Phone: 308/938-3825 Fax: 308/938-5335

Nevada Legislative hotlines: (702) 687-5545 (sessions) (702) 687-6827 (between sessions)

Nevada State Department of Education
700 East Fifth Street
Carson City, NV 89710
(702) 687-9141 FAX (702) 687-9101
URL: http://www.nsn.k12.nv.us/nvdoe/

Senate Human Resources & Facilities Cmte (702) 651-5591
House Education Cmte
(702) 646-1018

Nevada Rural School District Alliance
Educational Leadership Department
College of Education, MS 278
University of Nevada-Reno
Reno, NV 895570029
Phone: 702/784-1107 Fax: 702/784-6766

New Hampshire Legislative hotline: (603) 271-2239

New Hampshire Department of Education
101 Pleasant Street
State Office Park South
Concord, NH 03301
(603) 271-3144 FAX (603) 271-1953
http://www.state.nh.us/doe/education.html

Senate Education Cmte
(603) 271-1403
House Education Cmte
(603) 673-5385

New Jersey Legislative hotline: (609) 292-4840 (800) 792-8630

New Jersey Department of Education
P.O. Box 500, 100 Riverview
Trenton, NJ 08625-0500
(609) 292-4469 FAX (609) 777-4099
URL: http://www.state.nj.us/education

Senate Education Cmte
(973) 984-0922 (Aide)
House Education Cmte
(732) 840-9028 (Aide)

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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION	EDUCATION COMMITTEES	RURAL CHALLENGE PARTNERS	RURAL ORGANIZATIONS
New Mexico Legislative hotline: (505) 986-4600			
New Mexico State Department of Education Education Building 300 Don Gaspar Santa Fe, NM 87501-2786 (505) 827-6688 FAX (505) 827-6520 URL: http://sde.state.nm.us	Senate Education Cmte (505) 882-6200 House Education Cmte (505) 843-6641	Santa Fe Indian School Planning and Evaluation 1502 Cerrillos Road Box 5340 Santa Fe, NM 87505 (505) 989-6321 (505) 989-6317 Fax	New Mexico State Department of Education Rural Representative 300 Don Gasper, Room 301 Santa Fe, NM 87501-2786 Phone: 505/827-6588 Fax: 505/827-6696
New York Legislative hotline: (518) 455-7545 (800) 342-9860			
New York Education Department 111 Education Building Washington Avenue, Albany, NY 12234 (518) 474-5844 FAX (518) 473-4909 URL: http://www.nysed.gov	Senate Education Cmte (518) 455-3181 House Education Cmte (518) 455-5506		
North Carolina Legislative hotline: (919) 733-7779			
North Carolina Department of Public Instruction Education Building 301 North Wilmington Street Raleigh, NC 27601-2825 (919) 715-1299 FAX (919) 715-1278 URL: http://www.dpi.state.nc.us	Senate Education/Higher Education Cmte: (919) 942-6528 House Education Cmte (919) 715-0875	Project ALC Resources for Educational Systems & Associates PO Box 33, Shawboro, NC 27973 (919) 232-3035 (919) 232-2757 (Fax)	
North Dakota Legislative hotlines: (701) 328-2900 (sessions) (701) 328-2916 (between sessions)			
North Dakota Department of Public Instruction 11th Floor, Department 201 600 East Boulevard Avenue Bismarck, ND 58504-0440 (701) 328-2260 FAX (701) 328-2461 or tlalonde@mail.dpi.state.nd.us URL: http://www.dpi.state.nd.us/	Senate Education Services Cmte (701) 328-2916 (Staff) Senate Education Finance Cmte (701) 328-2916 (Staff) House Education Services Cmte (701) 328-2916 (Staff) House Education Finance Cmte (701) 328-2916 (Staff)		North Dakota Small Organized Schools (NDSOS) North Dakota Department of Public Instruction State Capitol 600 East Boulevard Ave., 9th Floor Bismarck, ND 58505-0440
Ohio Legislative hotlines: (614) 466-8842 (800) 282-0253			
Ohio Department of Education Room 810, 65 South Front Street Columbus, OH 43215-4183 (614) 466-3304 FAX (614) 644-5960 URL: http://www.ode.ohio.gov	Senate Education Cmte (614) 466-3780 (Legislative Aide) House Education Cmte (614) 466-3819 (Legislative Aide)		
Oklahoma Legislative hotline: (405) 521-5642			
Oklahoma State Department of Education 2500 North Lincoln Boulevard Oklahoma City, OK 73105-4599 (405) 521-3301 FAX (405) 521-6205 URL: http://sde.state.ok.us	Senate Education Cmte (405) 521-5551 (Executive Assistant) House Education Cmte (405) 557-7322 (Lead Staff)		
Oregon Legislative hotlines: (503) 986-1180, (800) 332-2313			
Oregon Department of Education 255 Capitol Street, NE Salem, OR 97310-0203 (503) 378-3573 FAX (503) 378-4772 URL: http://www.ode.state.or.us	Senate Education Cmte (503) 986-1635 (Policy Analyst) House Education Cmte (503) 986-1422 (Executive Support)	Tillamook County Education Consortium 6825 Officers Row Tillamook, OR 97141 (503) 842-2558 (503) 842-6854 (Fax)	Oregon Small Schools Association P.O. Box 5452 Salem, OR 97304 Phone: 503/435-1704
Pennsylvania Legislative hotline: (717) 787-2342			
Pennsylvania Department of Education 10th Floor, 333 Market Street Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333 (717) 787-5820 FAX (717) 787-7222 URL: http://www.cas.psu.edu/pde.html	Senate Education Cmte (717) 787-2637 (Secretary) House Education Cmte (717) 783-9311 (Secretary)	Warren Co., PA Selbourne Project Institute of Natural History 311 Curtis Street Jamestown, NY 14701-9620 (716) 665-2473 (716) 665-3794 (Fax)	
Rhode Island Legislative hotline: (401) 751-8833			
Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education 255 Westminster Street Providence, RI 02903-3400 (401) 222-4600, Ext. FAX (401) 222-6033 E-Mail: ride0015@ride.ri.net URL: http://instruct.ride.ri.net	Senate Health, Education & Welfare Cmte: (401) 222-2293 House Health, Education & Welfare Cmte: (401) 222-2466		
South Carolina Legislative hotlines: (803) 734-2060 (800) 922-1539			
South Carolina Department of Education 1006 Rutledge Building 1429 Senate Street Columbia, SC 29201 (803) 734-8492 FAX (803) 734-3389 URL: http://www.state.sc.us/sde	Senate Education Cmte (803) 212-6250 (Director of Research) House Education & Public Works Cmte (803) 734-3053 (Director of Research)		South Carolina Association for Rural Education 821 North Mine St. McCormick, SC 29835 Phone: 803/465-2898 or 465-2387 Fax: 803/465-2883

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South Dakota **Legislative hotline:** (605) 773-4498

South Dakota Department of Education and Cultural Affairs
700 Governors Drive, Pierre, SD 57501-2291
(605) 773-3134
TTY (605) 773-6302 FAX (605) 773-6139
URL http://www.state.sd.us/deca/

Senate Education Cmte
(605) 339-0565
House Education Cmte
(605) 339-3435

Program for Rural School and Community Renewal
College of Education and Counseling
Wenona Hall Box 507
South Dakota State Univ
Brookings, SD 57007
(605) 688-4448

Tennessee **Legislative hotline:** (615) 741-3511

Tennessee State Department of Education
Andrew Johnson Tower, Sixth Floor
710 James Robertson Parkway
Nashville, TN 37243-0375
(615) 741-2731 FAX (615) 741-6236
URL http://www.state.tn.us/education/

Senate Education Cmte
(615) 741-3038
House Education Cmte
(615) 741-3979

Tenn-GA-Lina
Van Buren County High School
PO Box 278, Spencer, TN 38585-0278
(615) 946-2442 (615) 946-2733 (Fax)

Walden's Ridge Central High School
Walden's Ridge Cluster
PO Box 303, 1119 Knoxville Highway
Wartburg, TN 37887
(423) 346-6616 (423) 346-5665 (Fax)

Tennessee Center for Rural Education
Alvin C. York Institute
P.O. Box 70
Jamestown, TN 38556
Phone: 615/879-2138 Fax: 615/879-2147

Texas **Legislative hotlines:** (512) 463-1251 (sessions) (512) 463-1252 (between sessions)

Texas Education Agency
William B. Travis Building
1701 North Congress Avenue
Austin, TX 78701-1494
(512) 463-8985
FAX (512) 463-9008
URL http://www.tea.state.tx.us

Senate Education Cmte
(512) 463-0131 (Clerk)
House Public Education Cmte
(512) 463-0804 (Clerk)

Schleicher County ISD
PO Box W, Eldorado, TX 76936
(915) 853-2514 (915) 853-2514 (Fax)

Texas Interfaith Education Fund
1106 Clayton Lane #120W
Austin, TX 78723
(512) 459-6551 (512) 459-6558 (Fax)

Llano Grande Research
PO Box 127, Edcouch, TX
(956) 262-4474

Texas Rural Education Association
Region VIII Education Service Center
Box 1894, Mt. Pleasant, TX 75458
Phone: 903/572-9251 Fax: 903/572-8551

Utah **Legislative hotlines:** (801) 538-1029 (House) (801) 538-1035 (Senate)

Utah State Office of Education
250 East 500 South
Salt Lake City, UT 84111
(801) 538-7500 FAX (801) 538-7521
URL http://www.usoe.k12.ut.us

Senate Education Cmte
(801) 673-1522 (Research Analyst)
House Education Cmte
(801) 253-4409 (Research Analyst)

Utah Rural Schools Association
250 East 500 South
Salt Lake City, UT 84111
Phone: 801/538-7892 Fax: 801/538-7769

Vermont **Legislative hotline:** (802) 828-2231

Vermont Department of Education
120 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05620-2501
(802) 828-3135 FAX (802) 828-3140
URL http://www.state.vt.us/educ

Senate Education Cmte
(802) 828-2228
House Education Cmte
(802) 828-2228

Vermont Rural Partnership
PO Box 213
Peachham, VT 05862
(802) 592-3513

Virginia **Legislative hotline:** (804) 786-6530

Virginia Department of Education
P.O. Box 2120, 101 North 14th Street
Richmond, VA 23218-2120
(804) 225-2020 (800) 292-3820
FAX (804) 371-2455
URL http://www.pen.k12.va.us/go/VDOE

Senate Education & Health Cmte
(703) 352-1991 (Research Associate)
House Education Cmte
(757) 562-4283 (Clerk)
(703) 323-9556

Washington **Legislative hotlines:** (360) 786-7573 (800) 562-6000

Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
Old Capitol Building
600 South Washington
P.O. Box 47200, Olympia, WA 98504-7200
(360) 586-6904 FAX (360) 753-6712
URL http://www.ospi.wednet.edu

Senate Education Cmte
(360) 786-7624 (Legislative Assistant)
House Education Cmte
(360) 786-7966 (Committee Staff)

Cascade Consortium
Methow Valley District #350
18 Twin Lakes Road
Winthrop, WA 98862
(509) 996-2215 (509) 997-5970

West Virginia **Legislative hotlines:** (304) 347-4836 (800) 642-8650

West Virginia K-12 Schools
Building 6, 1900 Kanawha Boulevard East
Charleston, WV 25305-0330
(304) 558-0304 FAX (304) 558-2584
E-Mail: wvde@access.k12.wv.us
URL http://wvde.state.wv.us

Senate Education Cmte
(304) 357-7937
House Education Cmte
(304) 357-3265

Wisconsin **Legislative hotlines:** (608) 266-9960 (800) 362-9472

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
125 South Webster Street
P.O. Box 7841, Madison, WI 53707-7841
(608)267-9153 (800) 441-4563
FAX (608) 267-1052
URL http://www.dpi.state.wi.us

Senate Education & Financial Institutions Cmte
(608) 266-5830 (Clerk)
House Education Cmte
(608) 266-8077 (Clerk)

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Wyoming **Legislative hotlines:** (307) 777-6185 (sessions) (307) 777-7881 (between sessions)

Wyoming Department of Education
Second Floor
2300 Capitol Avenue, Cheyenne, WY 82002
(307) 777-7675 FAX (307) 777-6234
E-Mail: (catch@educ.state.wy.us
URL http://www.k12.wy.us/wdehome.html

Senate Education Cmte
(307) 777-7220 (Secretary)
House Education Cmte
(307) 777-7852 (Secretary)

Contact Information

The Rural Challenge Policy Program seeks to understand complex issues affecting rural schools and communities; to inform the public debate over rural education policy; and to help rural communities act on education policy issues affecting them.

The Policy Program is part of The Rural Challenge, a national non-profit organization helping rural communities develop and operate genuinely good public schools. Its premise is that schools can be educationally powerful centers of community, linked to the culture, history, and ecology of the places they serve. Every community is important as a place to express shared values and accept social responsibility, as well as to achieve individual success, and schools should educate children in the context of such community values. The Rural Challenge is supported in part by the Annenberg Foundation through a generous gift from Walter Annenberg.

The Rural Challenge Policy Program
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www.ruralchallengepolicy.org